

*Editors Note: This is the final article of a three-part series by the MAGTF Staff Training Program (MSTP) on the subject of information management (IM). This first article focused on the information management officer's (IMO) role within a unit's IM program, while the second article focused on the importance of battle rhythm in IM. This final article examines trends observed in IM and discusses tools available to assist MAGTF staffs to meet the challenges presented by "information overload".*

In today's warfighting environment, success for the MAGTF is increasingly dependent upon our ability to use information. To use information effectively—and overcome the challenges presented by "information overload"—it is vital that the MAGTF commander develop a sound information management (IM) plan. A well thought-out IM plan, even when supported by capable command and control (C2) technology and systems, must be executed by personnel who are trained and understand how to use information to accomplish the mission.

### **Information Management Shortcomings**

The IM shortcomings most-often observed by the MSTP are caused by the inconsistent and haphazard implementation of the MAGTF IM plan. This is mainly because of:

- Improper management and use of the commander's critical information requirements (CCIRs).
- Failure to establish or follow requests for information (RFI) procedures.
- Underdeveloped skills for managing the MAGTF common tactical picture (CTP)/common operational picture (COP).

**The Information Management Plan.** The IM plan expresses how the commander will manage and control information. It reflects the three elements of C2: information, people, and C2 support structure. An effective IM plan provides guidance to ensure that quality information is provided to those who need it in a form that they can quickly understand. The IM plan should include IM filtering tools (unique IM personnel needs such as duties, responsibilities, and skill requirements), C2 support structure requirements (processes and procedures), and IM system protection. It should also include specific guidance for management of the CTP/COP, the collaborative planning system, RFI management, and network applications used to share critical and relevant information.

Effective IM plan implementation is often frustrated for a variety of reasons. These can include—

- An inherent lack of understanding of rapidly evolving information technologies.
- Use of different C2 tools by different combatant commands.
- An IM plan that was developed as an "after-thought" during planning.
- An IM plan that fails to capture the information requirements of the commander so that he can make timely decisions.

Even if the IM plan is not executed precisely as envisioned—and few ever are—the process of determining information requirements should result in a deeper situational awareness, which improves future decisionmaking. A sound IM plan can provide a powerful framework to effectively manage MAGTF information requirements and will enhance the success of MAGTF operations.

**Commander's Critical Information Requirements.** CCIRs are information regarding the enemy and friendly activities and the environment identified by the commander as critical to maintaining situational awareness, planning future activities, and facilitating timely decisionmaking. Managed properly, CCIRs are potent tools used to filter information and present it to the commander so that he can make key decisions.

The amount of redundant unprocessed, “raw” data provided to commanders remains a challenge to overcome. Ineffective management procedures for CCIRs includes failure to post or display them in a conspicuous and timely manner, failure to update them once answered, and the failure of decisionmakers to recognize when CCIRs have been answered. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-40.2, *Information Management*, states that, “CCIRs focus the staff on the type and form of quality information required by the commander, thereby reducing information needs to manageable amounts.” By effectively using CCIRs the staff can provide the commander with quality information that enables the MAGTF to maintain tempo.

A CCIR must be common knowledge within the MAGTF and the major subordinate commands. It is essential that the CCIRs are displayed and tracked by the staffs. This can be done by posting them in prominent locations in the combat operations center (COC), attaching them to a C2PC overlay, or placing them on a website. They should also be part of the transition brief or drill. There are many ways to manage CCIRs and a good MAGTF IM plan addresses those processes.

**Management of Requests for Information.** RFIs should be used to satisfy time-sensitive requirements related to current operations that are not necessarily associated with existing requirements, published information, or found in other sources. They are often irregularly managed, reducing the effectiveness of this IM process. Several issues need to be considered when handling RFIs. Submission format, quantity, tracking, naming conventions, type (intelligence or other for instance), and organizational responsibilities should be designated in the IM plan. Also, personnel with appropriate authority should be designated as RFI managers to ensure timely flow of information through the system.

**Common Tactical Picture and Common Operational Picture.** All information that is collected eventually culminates into the CTP (at the MAGTF-level and below) or the COP (for the MAGTF-level and above). The staff must provide the best quality CTP/COP to maintain the commander’s and their situational awareness.

Track management skills are important to help develop the CTP/COP and facilitate the best depiction of the battle space, friendly, and enemy forces. Unfortunately, this ability is underdeveloped at many staffs. Track management procedures must be part of the unit’s standing operating procedures. These procedures should encompass overlays, collaborative information tools (C2PC), office automation tools, controlling authority, and handling time sensitive information.

CCIRs, RFI, and the CTP/COP, along with the mission statement, commander’s intent and guidance, and battle rhythm, are powerful tools for IM. These tools help the MAGTF commander make sound and timely decisions.

## **Training**

The solution to IM shortcomings does not lie in new equipment. The Marine Corps has highly capable C2 and communications systems, computers, and office automation software that produce an excess of information, but IM procedures have not kept pace. Many of the shortcomings mentioned above can be dealt with through integrated training of staffs and individual Marines. More training, both individual and collective (i.e., operator and COC watch crews) on existing systems is the one of the steps to cure our information ills. However, the cure must begin with the commander clearly articulating his IM requirements to his staff.

### **A PRACTICAL TTP**

One method for practicing IM regularly, as well as reducing a unit’s adjustment from garrison to tactical operations, is to use IM tools daily. For instance, the MSTP has begun trials on an MS Outlook based (free download called “Digital Dashboard”) application that consolidates mission statements, commander’s intent and guidance, CCIRs, battle rhythm, significant events, and other tools in a desktop display for all personnel.

In this way, when the MSTP deploys to support an exercise, its tactical IM is similar to its garrison IM. Units can see an example of “MSTP Today” at: [www.mstp.quantico.usmc.mil](http://www.mstp.quantico.usmc.mil). MAGTFs can easily incorporate tactical IM in garrison activities using this and other tools. For instance, units can practice managing their CTP/COP by using C2PC to track subordinate units conducting field/live-fire, aviation, or combat service support activities.

C2 system training is emerging as a critical issue within the Marine Corps. IM, C2, and information technology systems training must be integrated across the six warfighting functional areas (command and control, maneuver, fires, intelligence, logistics, and force protection) as well as taught at training and education institutions. For example, company grade officers will have the opportunity to gain exposure to this type of training at Expeditionary Warfare School and soon the Marine Corps will have the MAGTF Information Systems Training Centers for the operating forces. This training needs to be sustained at the MAGTF-level.

## **Conclusion**

Training is crucial to understanding the processes that occur within a MAGTF. Integrated training in both C2 systems and IM process is critical to effectively attacking “information overload.” Plan and train according to the organization’s IM plan as a matter of daily business. Technical deficiencies in the use of C2 systems and office automation tools will diminish over time as commanders communicate what they expect from their staff in the form of a detailed IM plan. Through the process of training to the IM plan, staffs will become proficient users of the tools that are available to them.

Training and planning are interwoven into the process for successful staff performance in a modern COC. Waiting to learn the process and the tools during a training event is too little too late and creates unnecessary disruptions in the learning process. Nearly all of the tools—mission statement, commander’s intent, CCIRs, RFIs, CTP/COP—that MAGTF staffs have available can be employed in garrison much the same as in combat operations. Formal schools for planners and systems operators provide an introduction, and proficiency comes from repeated practice.

As the MAGTFs continue to develop comprehensive IM training and implement sound IM procedures, IM can increase its’ effect as a combat multiplier in MAGTF operations.